

## SUMMER

Hinata sat beside one of his best friends Eita, it's been 2 weeks since he and Kageyama got the quick right at the Aoba Johsai scrimmage. One week since Eita picked him up from Karasuno and Nishinoya san came up to him worried that he might have been seduced by some motorbike delinquent. Shouyo had stifled a laugh and sported a pink tint on his cheeks which he claimed to have been from practice and not the thought of the prospects of him dating the older boy.

This was not a part of Hinata's memories, but Eita, to Shouyo, was his alone. The unexpected friend who had helped him over and over, like a good friend would, like a best friend would. He didn't care if Eita had been a parallel that never crossed affections or even familiarity in the absence of a net in between with the Shouyo in his mind, Sho could not be more than glad they happened, that they beat THE Ushijima Wakatoshi who, despite being the watered-down version of his future strength, was still the most formidable ace in Miyagi.

This past week he had been over at Shiratorizawa 3 times, this one being the third. He felt out of routine, yet peaceful, like he had taken a breather from his marathon, which had years to go on.

Shiratorizawa didn't change dorm assignments till the class graduated from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>. There were pieces of Eita scattered around the room. The posters he had put up of MCR and Nirvana in his first year, the slight doodles of formulas on the bedside wall, probably by a very stressed exam time Eita, and the guy sitting beside Sho right now, in a soft powder blue shirt which was a stark contrast to the sharp leather jacket he had on 30 mins ago as they rode through the night streets.

Now Sho was staring, deliberately, and he made no attempts to hide it. The older boy had been playing a tune on the acoustic guitar, and looked absolutely absorbed in it, he had acknowledged the peaceful presence of Sho, and while it may seem weird to have a friend over, sitting beside you and not make an attempt at a conversation, Eita treasured this moment more than ever.

One more fact was that Eita was painfully aware of being observed like he was a ball being tossed around in the court, the only thing that could make Sho focus to this extent.

He decided to finally look at Sho, no streak of surprise on his face, but there was this fondness, awfully warm and slightly overpowering. Then slowly slipped in hesitation, for the first time? Probably not the first but it wasn't awarded the same acknowledgement as the peace or the comfort. The hesitation hung in the air, like an uninvited guest, a very stubborn uninvited guest. Fear crept in Eita's mind, in the same fashion as that of the resilient hesitation.

When you have something that you treasure so much and something you crave to have every moment, a lack of which pains you in a subtle way, not very intense but very constant; it was too precious to be fiddled with, the fear of loss has always been a tad bit more prominent than the hunger of risks for gain in most humans.

Although Eita would argue that the determined, never stagnant enigma beside him, was rightfully not included in the coward bracket Eita was a resident of.

Sho spoke, still staring, "You know, one of my Senpais thought you were some motorbike delinquent, but here you are strumming the guitar like a normal teenager", a very serene, normal teenager, Shouyo added in his mind.

Eita smiled, a very normal smile but Shouyo would rather describe it as contradictory, it was electric, clashing with the serenity. It made him feel warm, like a normal teenager, and not some strange boy who carried his future in his veins.

"Well can you blame him; I am rather hot and awesome"

"Now you sound like Oikawa, Ei"

Sho let out a small laugh, and Eita followed suit.

There was a pause.

"You can kiss me, you know, you're allowed." Sho continued, leaning forward ever so subtly, after their short spell of laughter. One would say it sounds quite cocky, or presumptuous of Sho to say that but that one, whoever it was, didn't matter anymore.

Sho closed his eyes as he felt a pair of soft lips brush against his own, and like a prayer uttered in an empty church, they settled, mixing into the silence.

They parted, Eita took a few moments to register what he had done. It wasn't quick or brash, although it may look like he acted on pure impulse. "You're allowed", the words repeated in his head.

He shifted slightly, resting his head on the smaller boy's shoulder and said out loud "I am allowed". Only then he realized it had never been a risk, it was too subtle, too peaceful, too endearing to be a risk or even a leap. It was a step, a very significant one.

Eita felt fingers running through his well-conditioned hair, and his long-awaited craving just becoming. Settling between them, like nit has always been there, like it had belonged there.

Sho closed his eyes, leaning against the bedside wall, careful not to discomfort the person beside him. He had tasted acceptance, acceptance of the person very important to him and not to the pro player Hinata.

A person he claimed to be his treasure and not a shared commodity of the person he was trying to surpass. He still wanted to chase that future, but was no longer tied down to it, and after this long while, he felt home.

"Eita" he called out, the addressee hummed a response, "I may like you a lot more than I thought, a lot more differently than a friend should, is that okay?". There was a surety in his voice. Even so, Sho felt like he would combust into flames if he were to look at Eita at that moment.

"I like you a lot too, Sho." Their voices were soft, yet their hearts were beating the same way it did after a perfect set when the ball slammed against the

wooden floor like a BAM. There were no dramatic declarations of love, it was absolutely textbook. The guitar now shared both of their laps as they remained in that comfortable position with Eita nuzzling his face into Sho's neck and soon it would be time for them to carry on with each of their races once again.

*To ride along with you- '*

## II

### SPRING TOURNAMENT

25:23; 20:25; 28:26

"We won!!!!" Tanaka was the first to shout, the team erupted in ecstatic chatter.

"Daichi san, I'll be back in 20 mins before the award ceremony", Daichi nodded in approval. Sho sprinted off, he could see Eita leaning against the wall of the corridor they had agreed to meet at. He looked at Sho, there was sadness but there was warmth, Sho hadn't known both could coexist this cordially, it hadn't been in Hinata's memories. He had slowed down, "You go win the nationals Sho, I am counting you..." Eita said, his voice spoke of determination and remorse, it had been his last high school tournament.

They stood there, in each other's arms and life felt all too real in that moment.

## III

### GRADUATION

*'And your eyes were full of tears...'*

Eita was graduating; it was spring again; his blazer had a missing button. Shouyo would be starting second year next week, college was farther than Shiratorizawa, he couldn't possibly run to Tokyo by mistake. Happiness of parents bubbling up all around the campus, incoherent unrhythmic sea of shutter sounds filled the air. Eita too was included in the photo rally. His parents knew about Hinata, they let Eita be. It had been a relief to be approved.

Graduation was supposed to be happier; he felt like he was kicked out from the world which granted the proximity to love Sho. 'Was he still allowed to kiss him?' he thought. Sho called soon after. "Omedeto Ei chan", he sounded happy, of course it was a big moment.

Tokyo was far, Sho was aware. But soon, Brazil would be further, Sho knew. He knew everything when he was 15 but now, he knew a lot lesser than he used to. It was an exhilarating feeling, to anticipate, to wait, to be surprised.

"Stay safe, take care" Sho said, his voice strained, eyes wet with unwanted tears. A calloused hand stroked his cheek. And Eita felt a very familiar soft pair of lips crash against his own, commanding promises of tomorrow and his heart settled into assurance, void of doubt.

## IV

### ANOTHER SUMMER

*'I'd give you the sun if you asked me'*

"Brazil?"

Sho nodded unable to look Eita in the eyes.

"Why Brazil?" He asked.

"Coach Washijo gave me the chance, two years to give it my all at beach volleyball. It's the fastest way to hone every skill. I don't want to give away the chance."

"Hmm" the silence was heavy; the silence was straining.

Shouyo continued carefully, "I understand if it's too much to ask for. " He couldn't help the slight hitch in his voice as he spoke, "whatever you decide, I'll always be glad I met you Eita. People don't go around giving up their youth for the sake of high school sweethearts. It's fine. It's alright".

*'I won't fight in vain*

*I'll love you just the same''*

"You could have all of my time, look at me Shouyo, do I look half hearted?" Eita spoke with conviction, as he cupped Sho's face up to look him in the eye. Shouyo felt like he could melt then and there, the cold January breeze could barely compete with the warmth of Eita's hands holding his face. Eita's soft lips against his, and the world felt lighter, smaller.

## V

### THE LAST WINTER

#### **"Next stop: Shibuya"**

The old lady in the train kept looking at Shouyo as his left knee kept bumping up and down. Even the best of us are nervous at some point. Although there was nothing to be nervous about. He was on a train to Tokyo to meet his boyfriend and graduating high school in April.

He just needed help in pointing out which part of that sounds realistic.

The train doors open and the crowd does half the job of walking him out. It's 31st Dec, hence the crowded night train. Shouyo felt the cold biting in his bones as he stepped out of the heated train.

There wasn't any doubt Eita would be there but there was an uncontrollable unrest and a small thought in a corner saying 'what if he isn't'. Gladly it was much ado about nothing as soon as he spotted a black faux leather jacket with quite the eye-catching white fur mane.

The next second, he felt Eita's piercing gaze upon himself and let the adrenaline take over his legs foregoing all public obligation to not run on the platform.

And moments later he felt the ever-familiar warmth envelope him and a small wish, lathered in vitriol, hoping the warmth welcomed him all the same, every time.

"You might be thinking a bit too hard, don't let your brain short circuit Sho"

He shot Eita a 'sharp yet devoid of any sort of malicious intent' glare but only hummed in response burying in the fur.

*'I don't want to go*

*But it's time to leave'*

VI

TOKYO AIRPORT, 2015

"Did you pack everything you needed?" A very fumbling Eita asked Sho for the 3rd time this morning. "Ei the only thing that's left is to pack you and sneak you through the luggage rally"

Eita looked predictably unimpressed at the remark, and let out a tired sigh. He had been acting more like Sho's mom than his mom was. And the guy in question didn't let go of a single opportunity to not tease him about it. Over the years Sho hadn't really grown much but he was a good 168 cm rounded off now. His orange hair was tied into a low pony with an ample amount of hair messily not incorporated in the rubber band. Clearly Eita's amazing fashion sense had brushed off on his boyfriend of three years, and he took pride in it.

Neither cried, at least not in front of each other. And hoped that the subtle stabbing pain in their hearts would remain mutual.

18 is a very special age, it's when you are kicked out of the places you've grown to treasure, to savagely survive in places that try to drown you in the vastness of their existence.

20 isn't really a special age, just a time you think you know everything, as a matter-of- fact you don't know shit. Or at least Eita didn't.

If you love something let it go, if it doesn't return, it was never yours.

*'And you went 10,000 miles away... '*